

Impact of Developing Intercultural Communication Skills on Overcoming Adjustment Challenges Faced by Asian Students in New Zealand Universities

International students have always faced many adjustment challenges compared to local students (Campbell & Li, 2008). New Zealand is a popular destination for Asian students to pursue higher education at its universities and Over 85% of international students in New Zealand come from Asian backgrounds (Campbell & Li, 2008). However, due to cultural and language differences Asian students face many challenges in adapting to a new environment with a different cultural background and being far from their family. The major issue has been identified for Asian students is English proficiency, cultural shock, and different teaching methods (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Improvement of the intercultural communicative competence (ICC) of overseas students a core strategy for overcoming this adjustment (King & Bailey, 2021). Therefore, this study aims to determine and evaluate how intercultural communicative skills can help Asian students handle their adjustment problems in New Zealand universities effectively.

Intercultural communication is a result of the interaction of individuals from different cultural background (Guo, 2012). Previous studies have indicated the essential roles of intercultural communication in language training (Gâz & Flanja, 2011), cultural adoption (Sarwari & Wahab, 2017), and verbal and nonverbal communication for higher education (Díaz-Rico, 2000). For example, Sarwari and Wahab (2017) state that good intercultural communication competence is the key factor for establishing proper and effective interaction with people from different cultures, resulting in the quick adoption of a new environment. Although intercultural communication involves many social skills, awareness, and sensitivity to culture, the means and objectives of communication are also critical parts which should be focused on to enhance ICC (Dusi et al., 2014). Furthermore, ICC is defined as a multidimensional concept consisting of communication effectiveness, adaptation, social integration, language competence, knowledge of the host culture, and social decentring. Intercultural communication competence (specifically communication effectiveness, ability to adapt, and ability to integrate into the social network of the host country) does seem to play a significant role in how well students cope with stress (Redmond & Bunyi, 1993). In addition to this, a good environment in education could also create favourable condition for improving the ICC of international students (Byram & Wagner, 2018).

Zhou and Sun (2020) also state that the use of social media can increase the intercultural communication competence of international students, resulting in the improvement of English proficiency and cultural adaptations. Searle and Ward (1990) found out, social media is vital for international students in New Zealand to conduct cultural transition processes and make more connections with their home country. While using social media and selecting communication objectives could relate more to personal background and conditions, universities play an important role in the

development of intercultural communication competence (King & Bailey, 2021). Interaction with many students in different countries and sharing knowledge about cultures should be encouraged in the classroom to help overseas students improve their intercultural communication skills.

Due to the differences in teaching methodology between New Zealand and Asian countries, most Asian students felt uncomfortable and dissatisfied with independent learning (Campbell & Li, 2008). Therefore, Campbell and Li (2008) recommend that the host universities should create appropriate courses for Asian students to help them cope with the issues by educating them with sufficient knowledge to enhance intercultural communication competence.

Changing their new environment, especially by studying in the multicultural environment of New Zealand, is an opportunity for international students to enhance their intercultural communication competence. The development of intercultural contact with people from the host country or other countries is a popular way for international students to adapt to a new environment and improve their linguistic abilities (Geeraerts et al., 2014). Zhu et al. (2016) used a Galileo metal model to evaluate the effects of intercultural communication on the cultural adoption of Chinese students in the United States. The results showed that increasing communication with host country residents can help students improve their adaptation to the environment and relationships. However, positive results were not always obtained in this study, indicating that there are still some other factors that affect adaptation. Notably, Campbell and Li (2008), who carried out a study on the learning experience of Asian students in New Zealand, also suggest that the differences in culture, thinking ways and vision are hidden in the formation of friendships and intercultural communication ability of these students.

The literature has demonstrated that intercultural communication competence is an essential part of every successful international student. Although the studies on intercultural communication competence have been well-researched, very little is known about the effects of improving intercultural communication competence on addressing the adjustment problems of international students in New Zealand universities, especially among Asian students. Therefore, this study aims to explore the role of intercultural communication competence in helping Asian students overcome the barriers in languages, teaching, academic fields, and multicultural adaptation. The study provides new insights into the intercultural communication mechanism of Asian students in New Zealand and contributes to the field of adjustment problems of international students.

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